Studies in Proverbs – "Guidance"

- Books – Sinclair Ferguson – "Discovering God's Will."
- PRAYER
- READ **II Samuel 7:1 – 17, Proverbs 16: 1- 9**,

Introduction

- In II Samuel chapter 7, King **David has a plan in mind**! We would agree it is a **noble plan**! One that has its **origins in a holy desire to glorify God**!
- **His plan is to build a Temple for God**. In verse 3 of chapter 7, the prophet Nathan tells him, "W**hatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it because the Lord is with you**."
- **Advice or counsel from a godly man**!
- Proverbs 16:1 reads, "**To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue**."
- Proverbs 16:9 reiterates the same truth, "**In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps**."
- God's word comes to David, by Nathan who tells him his offspring (namely Solomon) "**will build a house for my NAME**."
- So David had planned a course of action in his heart, but in the language of Proverbs 16, **the Lord determined his steps**!!
- **Question: What lesson on planning and guidance can we take from this event?**

  1) **God rules over all things, and His will is Sovereign.**

  2) **God directs by His revealed Word! The Prophet Nathan spoke the Word of God: Verse 17: "Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation."**

- **Was David disappointed that his plans had changed**? **No**, he was thankful for God's Word and His will!

- The answer to my question is in II Samuel 7, part of David's prayer! We did not read it, but in verse 20, he says, "**What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign Lord. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant**."

- "In his heart, a man plans his course (As David was doing), but the Lord determines the steps" (**God's ultimate purposes will be accomplished**)

- God's **sovereign will in the affairs of this world** and **God's Word**, which is His revealed Will, are **central to the theme of Guidance** found in the book of Proverbs.

- In fact, the book of Proverbs explains that **providing guidance is one of the key reasons** It was written.

- Look at Proverbs 1:1-7. **We can NOT underestimate the importance of these 7 verses to the entire book of Proverbs**! **It is like the Preamble** to the U.S. Constitution. "We, the People of the United States, to form..."

- **Proverbs 1:1-7** as was said in previous classes tells us the purpose of the Proverbs. One of the purposes is to provide guidance.

- Listen to what Solomon writes in **Proverbs 1:1 – 7**

- **Verses 5 and 6**

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— 6 for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise."

- "**Let the wise listen.**" In other words, these are those who have already embraced wisdom. "**Let the discerning get guidance**."

- Proverbs is written to provide wisdom and **guidance** in many practical areas of life!

- **Proverbs provide specific principles for guidance and planning. We will look at THREE of them this morning. They are listed in today's outline.**

1) **The Lord Guides according to his Sovereign Will.**
2) **By principles revealed in his Word**
3) **By the Counsel of others.**

I. The Lord Guides according to His Sovereign Will

- **Starting with the Lord guides in accordance with His sovereign will**.

- There is always an element of mystery regarding God's Sovereign will.

- He is the LORD and will accomplish all His revealed and unrevealed purposes! Man cannot fully comprehend the mind of God.

- "**How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out**" is the reflection of the Apostle when considering this mystery!

- This mystery is suggested in the passage we read earlier, **Proverbs 16:4**

"**The Lord works out everything for his own ends, even the wicked for a day of disaster**."

- The Lord **works out everything**! The God of Heaven and Earth is the ruler over all things! **There is NOTHING in which he does NOT have complete and absolute contro**l.

- He guides His people sometimes in ways that his people may not understand! There is a mystery!

- This is also suggested in **Proverbs 20:24**

"The Lord ordains man's steps**. How, then, can man understand his way**?"

- Or take **Proverbs 19:21**

"**Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the Lord's purpose prevails**."

- One last one that ties into this mystery**. Proverbs 21:30**

"**No wisdom, insight, or plan can succeed against the Lord.**"

- The wisdom of God's word repeatedly teaches us that certain aspects of God's will are mysteries. When we make plans and seek guidance, there may, in fact, be things we will not understand!

- There are providential circumstances and events that we cannot comprehend.

- Sometimes, providential circumstances are far better in our minds than we could have imagined.

- We are praying for something, and God provides above and beyond our request!

- Other times, providential circumstances can be far worse than we thought. We may not understand why something happened!

- **THERE IS MYSTERY in PROVIDENCE**!

- We may not understand why certain plans do not work out or why we don't understand God's providence.

- **What do we know for sure? God is good in all He does, whether we understand it or not!** Most Christians learn Romans 8:28 fairly early in their Christian lives.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

- So, there is a mystery when trying to understand God's will for guidance and planning.

- This is the first half of Deuteronomy 29:29. A passage many of you no doubt have memorized.

"<u>The secret things belong to the LORD our God</u>, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

- We are talking about the **<u>secret</u>** things!

- This is **<u>God's providential guidance</u>**.

1. **<u>Providential guidance</u>**: is God's controlling of all of life's forces so that the individual is necessarily caused to go in a certain course. Relates to what is called **God's decretive will** (what God will bring to pass)

   - So, the Proverbs teach that there is a certain mystery in guidance and planning.

     "**Man's steps are ordained by the Lord. How, then, can man understand his way**?"

   - Though there is a mystery, Proverbs teaches us what is required even though we don't understand God's providence.

   - **Turn to Proverbs 3:4-5. READ it.**

- **What is that requirement? <u>TRUST</u> a verse I think a number of you memorized a long time ago! Proverbs 3:4-5**

  "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

- The Christian is called upon to TRUST.

- The word in Hebrew means to confide in, to set one's hope and confidence. **Of course, in this case, it is to set one's hope and confidence upon the LORD GOD**!

- When we do so, when **we do not rely on our own understanding**, when we acknowledge **God (or know God)** in all things, **<u>the promise, or the result, is that He will make our paths straight</u>**.

- Your paths are a **<u>reference to guidance</u>**.

- In trusting him and not relying on our own wisdom, he will guide and keep us.

- **Charles Bridges writes in this passage (in the study notes)**: "**This is the polestar for a child of God-faith in his Father's providence, promises, and grace. This TRUST is not the mere cold assent of enlightened judgment. It is trust...With all your heart. It is a childlike, unwavering confidence in our father's well-proven wisdom, faithfulness, and love. He is the truth itself. Therefore He wants us to take him at his word and to prove his word to the very limit of his power**."

- The Lord guides ultimately according to His sovereign will. The righteous should trust and have loving confidence in God no matter what happens!

- **<u>Thoughts or comments before we move on to our next section?</u>**

II. <u>The Lord guides us by the principles revealed in His Word</u>

- Proverbs also emphasizes the importance of making plans and seeking guidance from God. **The Lord guides according to the principles revealed in His Word.**

- First, look at **Proverbs chapter 4:11 -13.** ***Have someone read it***.

"I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.
12 When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will

not stumble. [13] Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life."

- Once again, we see the phrase "**straight paths.**" In other words, **walking in righteousness.** When you walk, your steps will not be hampered. He is referring to the course of life itself.

- **How do we live life according to that passage?**

- By **holding on to the instruction** of the Word of God! This is where guidance is provided! It is in the commandments of God.

- The word to Hold On means to tie up or to bind. Tie up God's Instruction in our hearts!

- **Proverbs 6:20 -23** is similar.

"**My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. [21] Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. [22] When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. [23] for these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life**."

- It is important to recognize that this is **much more than the commands of a natural father and a mother**!

- The **word for command is the word used for the Law of God**. It is always associated with great authority.

- So, even beyond a parent's instruction, we have God's commands.

- We need guidance. Verse 23 - The **"commands are a lamp," and God's teaching is a "light"**!

- What a perfect match with Psalm 119. Verse 104!

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

- Instead of the mystery of God's providential will, we now have **God's revealed will**. Again, Deuteronomy 29:29, this time in the second part.

"The secret things (mystery of providence) belong to the LORD our God, **but the things revealed** belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

- "**The things revealed**"

- In classic reformed theology, this is known as **Biblical Guidance**: the directions and instructions God gives us in the scriptures for all moral decisions. Also called **God's perceptive will** (what we must obey)

- When we read in **Proverbs 22** under the "**Sayings of the wise**" section starting in **verse 17**: **"Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips So that your trust may be in the Lord**."

- This is the Word of God! **The sayings of Wisdom are the revealed Will of God**. We are to keep that in our hearts and have it ready on our lips!

- The Proverbs repeats over and over again the need to give close attention to the commandments of God.

- **Proverbs 13:13:** "**Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded**."

- **Proverbs 16:20** "**Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord**."

- So we see over and over again the importance of the revealed Word of God.

- Making decisions **should NEVER be in contradiction to the revealed Will of God**.

- **QUESTION: We said that TRUST is required regarding the mystery of God's Sovereign Will. What is required regarding God's revealed will**?

- **OBEDIENCE**. Obedience to the commands of God. **So, we have Trust and Obey**.

- How simple it sounds, yet our sinful heart makes it so difficult! Obedience is the great need we all have.

- **Proverbs 19:16** – "**Whoever obeys the commandment keeps his life; he who despises his ways will die**."

- It is NOT uncommon to hear fellow Christians say, "**The Lord led me to do something**."

- We believe the Lord gives guidance, but maybe it is my sinful heart or lack of faith. I never quite feel confident saying that!

- **The important question, though, that we should be certain we can answer**, especially if we say the "**Lord led me to do something**," is: Am I seeking to live my life in obedience to what God has revealed in His word and according to the principles of His Word?

- This is a key in Proverbs regarding this topic:

- **Guidance and Blessings in establishing plans and decisions** are, in many **ways, the benefits of the Righteous**!

- In other words, walking in God's wisdom and seeking to live our lives in obedience and faith (trust in God) **results in the Lord's blessings of guidance**!

- **If you had to distill the teaching in Proverbs on guidance to one key point, this might be the most critical component**!

- Guidance is the blessing of God for His people!

- **Proverbs 16:3 "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN?**

- **"And your plans will succeed**."

- **This does not mean that what we expect will always happen**. However, it does mean that God will provide for our needs according to his plans for us!

- **"I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble."**

- There is a great promise of God. If we take care of the most important thing in life, namely living to honor our Savior, we don't need to anguish over decisions and wonder if God is guiding us! I think that is the message of the Proverbs!

- Some weeks back we looked at the Righteous contrasted with the Wicked. A very frequent theme in Proverbs

- The blessing of God in life, including guidance and blessing plans, is for the Righteous.

- **Proverbs 2:7: "He (speaking of the Lord) stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity**."

- **Proverbs 18:10 "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe**."

- **Proverbs 4:18 "The path of the righteous (remember path represents the way we take in life) the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day**."

- **Proverbs 10:6** "**Blessings are on the head of the righteous**."

- We can go on and on. Proverbs repeatedly teaches that wisdom comes from walking the path of trust and obedience to God.

- God will provide what we need as a result!

- Are we willing to be submissive to God is the question we should ask?

- Sinclair Ferguson, a much-loved Christian writer and teacher, wrote a wonderful book, Discovering God's Will, which I read many **years ago**.

- I pulled out my copy this week in preparation for our study, and he has a short paragraph regarding God's Will and the relationship to our own obedience.

- **READ Sinclair Page 36**

- Brothers and sisters, in the language of the New Testament, "**IF God is for us, who can be against us**!"

- That should bring great comfort to Christians when it comes to guidance!

- **Thoughts or questions before we move on to our next section?**

III. The Lord Guides us by the counsel of others

- A third very important aspect of guidance and planning in Proverbs is **the subject of counsel**.

- **By counsel, we mean receiving advice and recommendations from others walking in wisdom.**

- **The Proverbs also teach about receiving counsel from the LORD**.

- **The message of wisdom in the Proverbs is that BOTH are necessary in life**.

- I want to start with the counsel we receive from others and then end with counsel from God.

Counsel and Counselors

- While Proverbs teaches that God will be a shield and a strong tower for the Righteous, it also teaches that seeking the wise and godly counsel of others is very appropriate.

- **Proverbs 15:22** – "**Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors, they succeed**."

- **Proverbs 19:20:** "**Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise**."

- The word that the NIV uses for "**guidance**" in Proverbs 1:5 when it reads "**let the discerning get guidance**" is the same word used in other passages for **counsel**.

- In fact, the New King James uses the word "counsel" for that passage.

- "**And a man of understanding will attain wise <u>counsel.</u>**"

- **What are some of the obstacles we face in receiving counsel**?

- Of course, we need God's wisdom and help here. We also need a strong dose of **<u>humility and a willingness to listen to counsel</u>**!

- We are greatly blessed in our church fellowship with so many Christians who have walked faithfully with the Lord for many years.

- It is important that they offer their wise counsel and, just as importantly, that we be willing to receive it.

- **Proverbs 27:9** says, "**Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend**."

- Receiving counsel from the wise should be "sweet"! **Is that our experience**?

- **Are you doing that if you know of someone in need and have wise counsel to offer?**

- **If you need counsel from someone you can trust, are you seeking it?**

- **The Proverbs teach there is wisdom in giving and receiving counsel!**

- Proverbs teaches us that a fool is a person **<u>without God's wisdom who thinks he does not need advice</u>**.

- His way seems right, so why even bother with counsel!

- **Proverbs 12:15: "The way of <u>a fool seems right to him</u>, (Notice now the contrast) <u>but a wise man listens to advice</u>."**

- It is the fool in Proverbs who is full of himself or herself. Pride and arrogance keep them from seeking wise advice.

- However, the fool may be all too happy to give advice. As the proverb says, "**Wisdom is too high for the fool**."

- It is wise to avoid their counsel. There is no shortage of examples of evil counselors in Scripture.

- **Proverbs 26:7:** "**Like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool**."

- So, while counsel is good and clearly a part of receiving guidance, it is critical that we seek counsel from the right source!

- **In addition to receiving godly counsel from the righteous, <u>Proverbs speaks of counsel from God.</u>**

- In **Proverbs 8:14,** Wisdom, the personification of God, is speaking:

- "**Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding; power is mine**."

- **Counsel is mine!** God is the believer's Counselor!

- **How do we seek God's Counsel?** Certainly, we have already spoken about his revealed Will and searching for God's counsel in Scripture.

- **What else, how else do we receive God's counsel? <u>Prayer for the leading and presence of the Holy Spirit</u>.**

- The good news is that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, is key in providing guidance **to Christians**!

- In John 16, the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to his disciples regarding the work of the Holy Spirit, who would come with power after his death and resurrection, said

"**I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. [13] But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, <u>he will guide you into all truth</u>."**

- God the Holy Spirit is named the "**Counselor**." Jesus said regarding His own physical departure from this world, also in John 16:

  "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you."

- What wonderful encouragement God has given us. Do we need guidance or advice? Seek from the best Counselor—the Holy Spirit, who lives in the heart of every believer!

- The Holy Counselor will lead us to Jesus—that is His role—to make the Savior more and more precious to us! We desperately need the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us love and adore the Lord Jesus Christ!

To summarize our study:

God guides according to His sovereign will; 2) guides according to His Word; and 3) guides through wise counsel, both from men and, most importantly, by the Holy Spirit, the ultimate Counselor for Christians!

- **Final thoughts or comments?**

- **Praise God!**

Handout for study on "Guidance."

Proverbs 3:5-6 – "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

- What lesson(s) on guidance can be learned from II Samuel 7: 1 – 17 and Proverbs 16:1 – 9?

- Note: David's response to the "change of plans."

- The Preamble: Proverbs 1:5 - "Let the wise listen and add to their learning **and let the discerning get guidance**."

The Lord Guides according to His Sovereign Will.

- Proverbs 16:4 - "The Lord works out everything for his own ends, even the wicked for a day of disaster."
- Proverbs 20:24 - "Man's steps are ordained by the Lord. How, then, can man understand his way?"
- Proverbs 19:21 - "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the Lord's purpose prevails."
- Proverbs 21:30 - "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord."
- The Mystery of God's Providence: We may not understand why certain plans do not work out for us; however, we know one thing is certain. What?

- **Providential guidance**: God controls all life's forces, so the individual is necessarily caused to go on a certain course. God's "decretive" will (what God will bring to pass).
- Proverbs 3:4-5: What is the requirement(s)? The result? Bridges: "*This is the polestar for a child of God-faith in his Father's providence, promises, and grace. This TRUST is not the mere cold assent of enlightened judgment. It is trust...With all your heart. It is a childlike, unwavering confidence in our Father's well-proven wisdom, faithfulness, and love. He is the truth itself. Therefore, He wants us to take him at his word and to prove his word to the very limit of his power*."

The Lord Guides by the principles revealed in His Word

- Proverbs chapter 4:11 - 13 - "I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life."
- What are "straight paths"?

- Proverbs 6:23 – "For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life."
- Psalm 119:104 - "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."
- **Biblical Guidance**: the directions and instructions that God gives us in the scriptures for all moral decisions. God's "perceptive" will (what we must obey, God's declared will)
- Proverbs 13:13 - "Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded."
- Proverbs 16:20 says, "Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord."
- Trust is required in reference to the mystery of God's Sovereign Will. What is required regarding God's revealed will?
- Proverbs 19:16 – "Whoever obeys the commandment keeps his life; he who despises his ways will die."
- Guidance is a "benefit" of the Righteous! Proverbs 2:7, 18:10, 4:18, 10:6
- Reading recommendation - "Discovering God's Will" by Sinclair B. Ferguson, Chapter 2 "Guidelines for Guidance."

The Lord Guides by the use of Counsel

1) Counsel of men
    - Proverbs 15:22 – "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors, they succeed."
    - Proverbs 19:20: "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise."
    - Proverbs 27:9 - "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend."
    - Proverbs 12:15 - "The way of a fool seems right to him, (Notice the contrast) but a wise man listens to advice."
    - The fool is all too happy to give advice! Proverbs 26:7: "Like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool."

2) Counsel of God

    - Proverbs 8:14 - "Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power."
    - How do we seek God's Counsel? The Word of God. What else?

    - John 16:12, 13a - "I have much more to say to you than you can now bear. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."
    - The greatest of all Counselors! - John 16:7 - But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counselor** will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you."